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WAR

Wassengiz Bell Esq

With the Author's very
Kind regards.

9. 2. 1902.

"THE FINGER OF GOD"*

A TRILOGY

By WILLIAM HEINEMANN

I. SUMMER MOTHS

II. WAR

III.

* Exodus viii. 19.

W A R
A PLAY
IN THREE ACTS
BY
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

LONDON § §
JOHN LANE AT THE SIGN OF THE
BODLEY HEAD IN VIGO STREET
MDCCCCI §



TO MAGDA

NOTE

No account has been taken of the topographical or tactical condition of the country in which this play is laid. The Old Fort, for instance, will be sought for in vain on the spot where it is here placed. The scene of the Norman invasion recommended itself for purely artistic reasons.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

GENERAL SIR ROWLAND ST. GEORGE, K.C.B.,

retired from the Army

LADY FULLER, his sister

CAPT. THE HON. GEORGE VANSITTART,

of the Horse Guards

THE HON. FRED VANSITTART, a cripple

THE HON. LUCY VANSITTART, daughter of

Lady Fuller

} Sons of
Lady
Fuller

FRANCES VANSITTART, wife of George

MAJOR HITCHCOCK, of the Royal Artillery

Orderlies, Soldiers, Servants

THE SCENE

represents a well-furnished library, used as morning and general living room, with glass doors leading to a conservatory, which opens on a verandah on the left. On the left of the stage is a large double writing table, on the right a chimney with a cosy corner. There are two standard lamps in the room, and doors on both sides of the stage.

TIME . . . *The present*

SEASON . . . *Winter in the South of England*

The First Act takes place in the early morning,

*The Second Act in the evening of the same day,
and*

The Third Act on the morning of the next day.



WAR

THE FIRST ACT

The GENERAL, smoking his early pipe, is seated on the sofa near the fireplace. A smart footman brings in the morning paper on a silver tray, hands it to the GENERAL and retires. The GENERAL tries to read, holding the paper close to his eyes and moving towards the window to gain light. He wears glasses while reading, and although not many years older than in "Summer Moths," he has in appearance aged considerably and is feeble. Sorrow and suffering have left their mark on him.

[Enter from the verandah, through the conservatory, FRED on LUCY's arm. The winter morning has flushed their cheeks. LUCY wears a shawl, and FRED a cap, both of which are at once removed. She carries his stick, and he uses a crutch on the other side. As soon as they have got inside, he takes the stick from her and goes on stick and crutch down to the writing table, where he is seen with his papers and maps during the greater part of the play. LUCY comes down with the GENERAL, whom she kisses on the forehead, and sits down next to him near the fire, holding his hand.]

GENERAL

So you have come in at last, my children?

LUCY

Yes, uncle. The morning is fresh, with quite a bite in the air; all the trees are white, and so is the earth.

FRED

That won't last long—the sun is coming out red through the mist, and thawing it.

GENERAL

I have felt the cold in here. Fact is, I always feel cold nowadays when I'm left alone. I've been waiting for you to read the papers to me.

LUCY

We did not know that they had arrived.

FRED

The men were puzzled in the stables. George must be coming down—at least he has ordered the hunters to be sent over to Polegate. His telegram arrived in the middle of the night.

GENERAL

In the middle of the night? To Polegate! There is no meet at Polegate to-day.

LUCY

I cannot understand his coming down for hunting, anyhow—after the field there was when he came the other day. He said it was not fit for a gentleman—nothing but a few broken-down farmers and tradespeople and women.

GENERAL

That is natural enough, with all one's friends in Africa. I wonder what news there is to-day? Fred, look at the *Times* and tell me what that big print is about. I am frightened when I see big print in the papers nowadays. Fact is, the bigger the print the worse the news, and it's the big print which attracts one irresistibly—especially me. My eyesight seems to be getting worse and worse, and so I seem to read nothing that is not bitter and heart-breaking. Ah! the bitterness of the news: it makes things all the harder.

LUCY

You are right, the bitterness of it! and then——

GENERAL

What then?

LUCY

Never mind, uncle. It is nothing: I was only thinking——

GENERAL

Thinking! Always thinking! I know—of *him*.

LUCY

Yes, uncle, thinking and hoping——

GENERAL

[*Getting up and pulling himself together.*] Fact is, I can't—I *will* not think of that.

LUCY

[*Appealingly.*] But, uncle He is your own son.

GENERAL

Need you remind me of that? Especially to-day. I feel apprehensive to-day—nervous: fact is, I scent some tragedy in the air—some new trouble; as if there had not been enough already!

FRED

[*Reading, interrupts.*] Thunder!

GENERAL

What is it, Fred, what is it? Have they got across the Tugela at last?

FRED

[*Reading.*] "British victory! Great bravery, but forced to retire on account of overwhelming odds." that is the big Type, but here is the dispatch itself: "During the night we seized Spion Kop. The crests were held the following day against severe attacks and heavy shell fire. Our men fought with great gallantry. The general who was in command on the summit being wounded, the officer who succeeded him decided to abandon the position. Accordingly, I withdrew the force to the south of the Tugela."

GENERAL

Back again? It makes one's blood boil to have to sit here with all one's experience and do nothing—nothing—after all these years of service.

FRED

Yes, yes! Not to be able to go out there and possibly be just one of the few who would turn the scale, yourself and a few others. Tho' it's worse for me—far worse. You have been out so many times, but I—I can never go—never.

[*A painful look passes between LUCY and the GENERAL, followed by a moment's silence.*]

FRED

[*Continues reading.*] The Queen writes the Commander-in-Chief :

"As so large a proportion of the Army is now in South Africa, the Queen fully realises that necessary measures must be adopted for home defence.

"Her Majesty is advised that it would be possible to raise for one year an efficient force from her old soldiers who have already served as officers or privates.

"Confident in their devotion to country and loyalty to her throne, the Queen appeals to them to serve once more in place of those who for a time are absent from these islands——"

GENERAL

[*Interrupting.*] She won't appeal in vain.

FRED

[*Continuing.*] "and who, side by side with the people of her Colonies, are nobly resisting the invasion of her South African possessions."

GENERAL

They will want me now. I may be too old for active service out there, but they cannot do without me at home. Fact is, I am not such a wreck after all!—still fit for that, anyhow!

FRED

They'll want *you* right enough, you—but not me. When you've gone to join them I'll sit here with the women, and twiddle my thumbs and envy you, all of you—you at home in the ports and in camp, marching with drum and fife—and those out there in the war.

GENERAL

You will be the comfort and the pillar of those at home, my boy. We all have our part to play—play yours like a man.

FRED

The part of a man—that's the part I want to play; not this, not this!

GENERAL

Have patience and hope! Remember Job, my boy.

FRED

Beautiful sacred lies!

LUCY

Fred, don't—you make me wretched.

FRED

I'm a brute, Sis ; I know it, but I can't help giving way, now especially. It was bad enough in the past to *see* them go out hunting and shooting, while I remained behind, but this is worse, a thousand times worse—to read, to be forced to realise it all.

LUCY

You might not have been sent out, even had you been a soldier. After all, George is still at home.

FRED

George, yes, George is at home ! But then Phil is out there fighting for the country, facing the music like a hero !

GENERAL

He has much to atone for ! Fact is, I will not hear his name. How often must I ask you not to bring all that back again ?

LUCY

You will yet be proud of Phil ! If only you could bring yourself to forgive.

GENERAL

[*With emotion.*] Forgive—no! Fact is, I cannot! But I'll be proud of him. He's a St. George after all. If there's a daring thing to do, he'll have to do it; he'll never be able to help himself—with the St. George blood in him. It was his idleness that did the mischief. I let him be idle—idle and self-indulgent.

[*Enter footman.*

FOOTMAN

[*Announcing.*] Major Hitchcock!

GENERAL

Ask Major Hitchcock in.

FRED

Ha, Hitchcock! There's a soldier after my heart—one who can use his head also.

GENERAL

A worker—a worker; not one of the usual youngsters of to-day—loafers, players.

FRED

Who learn their tactics from Ruff's Guide.

GENERAL

Fact is——

LUCY

Here is Major Hitchcock.

Enter MAJOR HITCHCOCK, in uniform.

HITCHCOCK

Good morning!

LUCY AND FRED

Good morning!

GENERAL

Morning! In uniform, my boy? How is that? I'm glad of it! Fact is, you've seemed discontented lately and restless.

HITCHCOCK

I hope I've not been unreasonably impatient to have my chance with the others! Even now we are only ordered under canvas at home. That is better than taking root in barracks—but it does seem tame when you read of all that is going on in South Africa.

FRED

Your going under canvas may be a preliminary—may lead to your being sent out.

GENERAL

It will be a good thing, anyhow—in the cold—to harden some of the youngsters before they have to face the toughest work. Some of them look as if they'd come straight out of a kindergarten. Recruits seemed different in my time.

HITCHCOCK

I have a good deal of faith in those frail-looking little townsmen. They are tough, although they may not look it. And they'll be all the better when they have roughed it a bit. This will prepare them——

FRED

To prepare man or beast—who would credit the War Office with so subtle a forethought! They would no more think of preparing men than they thought of preparing a map even of our own colony.

GENERAL

The want of a map, that's a fatal thing. That must account for a good many mistakes.

HITCHCOCK

They have come upon a mare's nest of a very different sort at the War Office this time. There were wild rumours about last night.

LUCY

Rumours? Nothing terrible, I hope! No more humiliations?

HITCHCOCK

There were all sort of rumours about last night. I could find out nothing definite; only an unusual amount of excitement, half-suppressed excitement and whispering. It was stated very distinctly that no soldier in England would sleep in bed to-night.

LUCY

What can be the meaning of that?

GENERAL

Practice, child, for the sort of easy-go-lucky chaps who have done the mischief in Africa. Fact is, I'm delighted to see the War Office wake up at last to the necessity of sterner service.

FRED

It reminds you of the German Emperor calling out

his swagger guards in the middle of the night, just to see how a surprise would find them.

HITCHCOCK

Maybe it's just that ; probably, I should say. Still, there were all sorts of wild cat stories about last night. People talked of an invasion, and that the French had been waiting to see us denuded of most of our troops to fall upon us.

GENERAL

That is nonsense, of course. After all, there is the Navy. Our Channel Squadron would make short work of them and their ships. Fact is they know well enough that they'd stand no chance if they tried to invade us.

FRED

They have done it before. They might try again.

GENERAL

They would soon find the difference.

FRED.

If they did we should know it here—as soon as anywhere, I suppose.

HITCHCOCK

There were other rumours about too. A man came into camp this morning and asserted that the

Dutch had declared war on us, in common cause with their Transvaal cousins. That caused a good deal of excitement, of course, and exaggeration. One chap declared he knew for certain that the whole of Europe was united against us. But all that is talk. The only definite thing I know is that we are ordered under canvas.

FRED

I suppose you're in camp at Polegate, near George.

HITCHCOCK

At Polegate? No ; we're near Battle.

LUCY

But George had his horses taken over to Polegate.'

HITCHCOCK

I am glad to know that. When I left camp we were expecting to hear exactly where the Guards would be. There seemed to be a doubt if the Mounted Yeomanry could be got together quick enough here. So they sent a couple of trains down in the night with George's squadron.

LUCY

I should have thought they would have kept the Guards in London.

HITCHCOCK

The idea must be that, as your brother, Miss Lucy, and I know this district better than any other two officers in the service, we might be of special use here. We are in supreme local command of the coast and district between Hastings and Eastbourne for a day at least. Of course it's all very unusual and unexpected. His colonel has been wired for from Scotland, and mine can't be here till to-morrow. He is at Chatham with the general. Meanwhile we two join hands; and what looks more like business than anything is the fact that we are to proclaim martial law at midday, and requisition even your male servants if we need them.

FRED

Martial law! But they can't declare martial law, surely, except in case of war or rebellion?

GENERAL

Fact is they may be experimenting in that also—to see how the people would take it.

HITCHCOCK

I shall know something for certain, I suppose, when I get back to camp, and I will at once let you know if there is anything to enlighten the situation.

LUCY

Do, Major Hitchcock. We shall be on tenterhooks until we hear. Uncle, what do *you* think this can mean? What can it be?

GENERAL

Fact is, I cannot attribute any very serious importance to it all. I have received no orders as yet, and if there were any real cause for alarm, especially in Sussex, they would not leave things in the youthful hands of our friend and of George. They would want a seasoned and experienced leader - don't you think so yourself, Major Hitchcock?

HITCHCOCK

I am convinced of it, sir.

FRED

You never know what the War Office may do. They are capable of anything. As far as your choice is concerned, Hitchcock, I really think they are in the case of the blind hen.

LUCY

Surely you don't approve of their wanton neglect of uncle in this?

FRED

I was referring to Hitchcock. The blind hen, you

know, used to miss the fattest grains of corn in its way and gobble up the hard and dry ones; only occasionally did it pick up, as if by accident, a really good morsel. Hitchcock is the War Office's good morsel—George just its usual sort of pick-up.

GENERAL.

I am sure they have shown good sense in selecting Hitchcock! I am glad they have—for their sake and (to HITCHCOCK) for yours, my boy (*shaking HITCHCOCK's hand*).

FRED

Of course they have—but fancy George in a responsible place.

GENERAL

You should not underestimate the value in war of fellows like your brother—they are wanted, with their slapdash and go—and sometimes they do better than——

HITCHCOCK

I consider myself especially fortunate in being associated with Captain Vansittart. I assure you, my dear Fred, it is a great honour and pleasure for me to divide this responsibility with him.

FRED

I'd rather you divided responsibilities with him

than I. However, just listen. I didn't see this before. "Rumour gained currency last night that Holland had declared war on England, and that a surreptitious attempt was anticipated to invade England."

GENERAL

It looks as if there were some truth in the thing, after all. Fact is, I'm sorry for them. There won't be many of those Dutchmen left if they try on anything of that sort—or indeed I'm a Dutchman.

FRED

[*Continues reading.*] "Unusual commotion existed at the Admiralty last night. Only a part of the Channel Squadron is apparently on our coasts at this very moment, but there are yet ample ships, it is thought, to protect the southern and eastern shores against an enemy much more formidable than the Dutch. In the meantime the remaining portion of the Squadron, which is cruising in the Bay of Biscay, has been summoned into the Channel."

LUCY

The Dutch, indeed! A tuppenny-ha'penny little country like that!

FRED

A Dutch invasion ! It would not be the first one after all. Van Tromp sailed up the Thames so that his guns were heard in London, and burned the King's Navy.

GENERAL

Ah, but that was in the days of Charles II. You can't compare England of to-day with the England of then, nor Holland of to-day with the Netherlands of then.

FRED

His task was none the easier for that. He had to depend upon wind and weather both for his coming and his going—his going, with a broom at his mast-head to show that he had swept the seas of the English.

GENERAL

I know ; but in the end they were beaten, just as the Boers or the Dutch or the French are sure to be beaten.

FRED

Meanwhile we might have a pretty unpleasant time, just as the people of Natal are having, and as they

had in London through Van Tromp. We would "muddle" through to success of course, but if an invasion of England, only on the scale of the present invasion of Natal, were possible, I think we'd soon make up our minds that it is better to be wise in time. Three months ago we thought the Army invincible.

GENERAL

The Army isn't beaten yet, my boy; set-backs only—muddles. The old story.

LUCY

Oh, but it's terrible to think of—terrible the cost of the muddling.

HITCHCOCK

Personally I don't think any foreign army would have much chance of success if it attempted to land in England. You need not be nervous, Miss Lucy; they would have to kill a great many of us before they could penetrate even as far as this.

LUCY

I am not afraid, indeed I'm not; but why should there be all this horror, this carnage?

FRED

This paper chap seems to agree with Hitchcock

listen. [*Continues reading.*] "Unquestionably the consequences to an invader would be absolutely fatal. Nevertheless it is recognised that, while our naval cordon was being made sufficiently impenetrable, a small force might be landed at some unprotected spot. Even such a small force would inflict very considerable inconvenience on the inhabitants before it could be effectively dealt with."

GENERAL

Stuff and nonsense! Fact is, these newspapers are the curse of all soldiering. I won't hear another word. Put the rubbish away, Fred. Fancy printing such mutinous stuff! They will be telling the enemy next exactly where there is an unprotected place—let him know where he can land unmolested.

FRED

[*To HITCHCOCK, aside.*] This will be your opportunity I feel it—I know it.

HITCHCOCK

My dear chap, I fear you rely too much on these rumours. I should be sorry if my chance of ultimate promotion depended on a Dutch invasion. I sincerely hope they will come, but I fear there is not much chance of that.

LUCY

Oh, Major Hitchcock, don't, don't wish such an awful thing!

[Exit as if near tears.]

HITCHCOCK

Miss Lucy! *[Following her.]* Lucy, Lucy! *[At the door LUCY turns to him with a look of complete devotion, tears in her eyes.]*

GENERAL

Little tender-hearted goose!

FRED

If they invaded us, I'd have them invaded in turn. *You*, Hitchcock, should lead the expedition. Ha, and you'd bring back from Amsterdam the British flags which Van Tromp stole.

HITCHCOCK

My dear fellow!

GENERAL

I wonder if George will come over to-day from Polegate? His sending for his horses without a message to any one of us——

HITCHCOCK

He is sure to come ; it may be his last chance of seeing you for some time, if there is any truth in all this.

GENERAL

I'm rather glad to think of George roughing it a bit—lazy beggar. Polo and hunting are all very well for a soldier, but they should not entirely absorb him.

FRED

If it were not for his polo and riding, I wonder whether any regiment would be encumbered with such a block-headed pig as dear brother George? Now, your own Phil——

GENERAL

[*Turning round angrily.*] Really, Fred, I must beg you to leave Phil out of the question. George is your brother, and I hope there is no similarity between him and that poor misguided boy of mine. Major Hitchcock, I am sorry that you should have heard Fred's unseemly outburst against his brother, who is a gallant soldier, notwithstanding a certain levity in the exercise of his profession.

HITCHCOCK

I assure you, General, we, his brother officers, respect and admire the excellent qualities of Captain

Vansittart. Fred is unfair to his brother. I fear, by the way, that I shall not be able to wait here on the chance of returning with him. [*To GENERAL.*] But before I leave, can I, sir, have a few words privately with you ?

GENERAL

Certainly, my boy. Do you mind, Fred ?

FRED

I will go.

HITCHCOCK

No, no ; stay ! I would rather you stayed. It is no secret I have to tell—nothing I would not wish you to hear. General St. George, I have great diffidence in asking you the question which is of the most vital importance to me. In addressing you now I am speaking, not to my superior officer, but to the uncle of my friend Fred and of Miss Lucy.

GENERAL

Out with it, my boy ; what is it ?

HITCHCOCK

I am for the first time taking active service. This game over at Battle is going to be child's play, of course, even should the Dutch come just there—but

God knows where I shall be sent to from there, or when or how I shall return. You know with what eagerness I go to serve the Queen—how willingly I would lay down my life for my country's sake.

GENERAL

I know it, my boy ; I am sure of it.

FRED

Wouldn't we all do that, if only we had the chance ?

HITCHCOCK

Still, there is one thing that makes me regret having to go—makes me almost shrink from my good luck, should it come.

GENERAL

What do you mean ? I don't understand. Have you any complications at home ? You don't mean to tell me that there's a woman in your case ?

HITCHCOCK

A woman—yes, sir ; there is indeed a woman in the case. A girl who is dearer to me than life—dearer to me than this uniform, and all the privilege it gives me. A girl, I say, for whom I would go out and

fight, and God ! for whom I would even stay at home and leave the fighting to others.

FRED

Hitchcock, be a man. What business have you to be influenced by any woman under the sun ? Go out. Your business is to fight and to win ; cripples—like myself—must put up with women for their companions—but you—you're made of nobler stuff.

HITCHCOCK

I knew what you would say, and yet before I go I must tell you all—plead guilty to the weakness—yes, and glory in it !

GENERAL

Clear your mind, my boy—and forget her. Then you'll go out and fight all the better.

HITCHCOCK

Your kindness makes things easier. You are right—a man will fight in many places, for many causes : for his country, for the flag, for ambition, for his Sovereign, for a mere idea, if you like ; but whatever the object of the battle may be, he will fight all the better if he knows that victory will bring him not only fame but also love.

GENERAL

Certainly, my boy ; but to the point ! Who is the lady ? If I can, I'll gladly help you. Fact is, you're right. The thought of those you leave behind, those who watch and wait for you, those whom you love—it is that which makes lion hearts.

[*Enter GEORGE, also in uniform.*]

GEORGE

I am glad I find you, Major Hitchcock. You are badly wanted in camp. We have just joined on to your men at Battle. The telegraph is hard at work, and your men seem helpless without you.

HITCHCOCK

I will go ; only, one word before I leave. I did not wish to speak of this before you, Captain Vansittart, but since you are here, and I have not a moment to lose, I cannot help myself. I was on the point of asking General St. George for his kind offices with Lady Fuller on my behalf as a suitor for the hand of your sister Miss Lucy.

GEORGE

My sister—you !

GENERAL

[*Stopping him.*] George, don't forget you are going to fight side by side. The next few days may show which of you two is the better man. [*To HITCHCOCK.*] Go, my boy. I can give you no answer : fight bravely, fight stoutly, and remember the brave deserve the fair.

[*As HITCHCOCK turns to go out LADY FULLER comes in with LUCY who slips past her and moves into the conservatory.*]

HITCHCOCK

I shall not forget.

LADY FULLER

George?—Major Hitchcock?—good morning.

FRED

[*To HITCHCOCK.*] Not a word now ; be careful.

HITCHCOCK

I am sorry, Lady Fuller, that I must leave just as you come. You will excuse me ; I am wanted urgently in camp.

LADY FULLER

Oh, but do tell me all this about mobilisation—state

of war. Lucy has been harrowing me while I dressed with quite incredible stories.

HITCHCOCK

You are correctly informed ; Miss Lucy has been a most accurate reporter. May I, in the interest of my duty, which calls me away, hope, my lady, that you will excuse me from telling you personally the details you ask for ? I can refer you to Captain Vansittart, however, whose information is more recent than my own. I wish you good morning, Lady Fuller. Good-day, sir ; good-bye, Fred. [*To LADY FULLER.*] May I ask you, Lady Fuller, to remember me very sincerely to Miss Lucy ?

LADY FULLER

Major Hitchcock, my family and myself wish you every success, and you may be sure that Lucy, with all of us, takes a warm interest in your welfare.

[*MAJOR HITCHCOCK turns as if to go out by the side-door, but notices LUCY in the conservatory. She beckons him to come to her. He stops short and goes out through the conservatory. He is seen for a few moments through the glass door in intimate conversation with her, and then passes out to the verandah. Before she enters the room again she is seen blowing him a kiss after he has disappeared down the verandah steps.*]

GEORGE

Impertinent rascal! What does he mean? Imagine my position in the Guards! My sister marrying a garrison gunner like that—a butcher's son, I believe, or something of the sort.

LADY FULLER

Marry Hitchcock! What are you talking of?

GENERAL

Sophy, Major Hitchcock has just confided to me his affection for Lucy, and he has asked me to plead his cause with you.

LADY FULLER

The man must be mad.

FRED

I don't see where the madness comes in. A lot of advantage we all of us get out of our precious nobility! The aristocracy would be all the better for a little intermarrying with the middle classes.

LADY FULLER

I really must ask you to keep your plebeian opinions to yourself. The Vansittarts have respected their origin for many generations, and I hope they will

continue to do so. Anyhow, so long as I have a voice in the matter my daughter will marry in those circles in which she was born.

FRED

If those precious ancestors had married outside of their own precious circles, perhaps there would be no cripples in the family.

LADY FULLER

Fred, you forget yourself!

GENERAL

Remember your mother, Fred.

LADY FULLER

How could he dare to ask *you* for such services?

GENERAL

I consider nothing could be more natural than that.

LADY FULLER

Indeed—and what answer did you give him?

GENERAL

I told him that a man who distinguishes himself in the service of his country ennobles himself.

LADY FULLER

At that rate, any Tommy who got a V.C. would be fit to marry a Vansittart.

GEORGE

The thing is monstrous. However, I think I gave him to understand what our attitude would be towards such an alliance.

FRED

You behaved like a cad !

LADY FULLER

You need neither of you excite yourselves. Major Hitchcock has forgotten his position, and if we ever see him again, Lucy will be the first to make him feel her only too natural resentment of his audacity.

Enter LUCY from conservatory.

LADY FULLER

[*To LUCY.*] Will you not, my child ? Have you heard what has taken place concerning yourself ?

LUCY

Concerning myself ?

LADY FULLER

You don't seem to know. I am glad to think that the young man has not forgotten himself so far as to broach this unpleasant subject to you.

LUCY

What do you mean?

FRED

The unpleasant subject to which mother refers is the fact that Major Hitchcock has had the temerity to ask for your mother's consent to your marrying him.

LUCY

And what answer did you give him?

GEORGE

[*Intervening.*] We told the impertinent puppy to marry a baker's daughter, like to like, and that we wanted none of the lower classes mixed up in our family.

LUCY

You would never have dared to say that to his face!

LADY FULLER

The young man had no opportunity of speaking to me on the subject. If he had done so, I should have found no difficulty in convincing him of the impossibility of such a step, and of the impropriety on his part of allowing the thought to cross his mind.

FRED

That isn't the idea he's gone away with, I can tell you. Uncle told him in so many words that if he killed enough Dutchmen, and didn't get himself killed, he would do all in his power to induce you to give him Lucy.

LADY FULLER

[To LUCY.] Has he ever dared to speak to you so disrespectfully as to hint at what he would venture to call his affection for you?

LUCY

Major Hitchcock has convinced me that he is deeply attached to me, and he has honoured me by asking me to become his wife.

GEORGE

The brute!

LADY FULLER

I only hope you put him very unmistakably into his place.

LUCY

I did—I promised Major Hitchcock to be his wife.

FRED

Bravo, Lucy! Don't let them frighten you.

LUCY

And I have this very minute, since he left you, repeated my promise, and have sworn by all that is holy that no power on earth shall keep us apart.

LADY FULLER

[*To GENERAL.*] It is scandalous. [*To LUCY.*] Lucy, I have to speak to you. Not here—not now! We will talk this matter over by ourselves. [*To GEORGE.*] George, when are you going back to camp?

GEORGE

Immediately. I have only ridden over just to say good-bye. Who knows when I shall be back. I wish they'd let one know what's going to happen. It's no good cancelling all one's engagements if one's

only going to hang about in camp at home. For the moment we two are supposed to be in charge of the coast defences. Rot I call it. What is the Navy for, I should like to know? It's all right chucking one's engagements if you're going away, even if it's only on a nigger shoot in Coomassie—but this business is obviously a wild goose chase.

FRED

There are rumours about of a war with Holland and an invasion.

GEORGE

I suppose that fellow Hitchcock stuffed you with that nonsense. He was in town last night, and probably made a nuisance of himself at the War Office. Messing about in all sorts of things that don't concern him. They positively hate him in Pall Mall.

FRED

You would not waste your evenings at the War Office.

GEORGE

No, indeed. Fancy my going there for choice—after dinner, too. I went to the Frivolity last night, saw "The Tissue-paper Girl," and had a jolly good time, I can tell you.

LADY FULLER

The "Tissue Paper Girl?"—I read about it. They say it is the best play ever seen in London. Not at all morbid—just the sort of thing you want to see in these days of disasters and captures and newspaper frights. You must take me to see that play next time we are in town, George.

GENERAL

For all our sakes—for the country's sake—I hope that will be soon, my dear. Major Hitchcock seemed to think——

GEORGE

Confound Hitchcock! I don't believe he knows anything.

FRED

What he said is fully confirmed in the papers.

GEORGE

In the papers, is it? What do they say?

FRED

Simply that an invasion is anticipated, and that considerable unpleasantness would be experienced by the residents of any district where it did happen. That must be clear *even* to you; and also that in such an eventuality it would be the business *even* of soldiers

usually engaged in polo playing to leave their game and attend to their profession.

GEORGE

Shut up, you little monkey! I've not come over to put up with your cheek.

LADY FULLER

George—Fred, please!

FRED

The worst of it is that a good deal will depend upon local command, because our coast defences seem to be on a par with the border defences in Natal. Listen to this: [*Reading.*] "We hear a good deal about obsolete guns sent to South Africa, but Dover people should not forget that at the present time there is not a single modern gun in the defence of this town."

GENERAL

They should not rely too much on the Navy. It cannot be everywhere at the same time.

FRED

[*Continuing.*] "Recently three breech-loading guns have been placed in the South Lines Battery, but these are also quite obsolete, being old guns rejected from ships. Beyond these there are no breech-loading

guns mounted on the sea defences at Dover ; and those on the land defences are even more obsolete, consisting of old Armstrong screw guns, which date back over thirty years ago ; and in addition we believe there are also some cast iron cannons, which are contemporaneous with the battle of Waterloo."

GENERAL

"Do you hear that ? Publishing it—so that they know, Dutch or French, just where we are unprotected.

GEORGE

Let them—I wish them luck ! Whoever wants to have a go at us—French or Dutch—I sincerely hope they'll come soon, if they come at all, and let us get it over.

FRED

So as to enable you to return to your polo.

GEORGE

Where is Frances ? Does she not know that I am here ?

LUCY

I will tell her. She was not very well this morning.

[Exit LUCY.

LADY FULLER

The only thing I beg of you, George, is not to expose yourself unnecessarily. Think of Frances and remember your father's death—a sheer useless sacrifice. You are just as intrepid. I wish the Army were made of nothing but Hitchcocks in times of war. I really do. The War Office could surely hire hundreds of thousands of them at the beginning of a war, so that gentlemen could stay at home and devote themselves to more seemly occupations than this horrible butchery. The Army should be a magnificent threat, not a slaughter-house. Officers should be smart and sportsmanlike. No foreign nation would ever dare to attack an army entirely composed of thoroughgoing sportsmen.

GENERAL

[*Laughing.*] My dear Sophy, your ideas on the Army are as magnificent as you'd wish the army itself to be. Your ideal army would not be very business-like at a pinch.

LADY FULLER

Whoever heard of an army being businesslike? Really, we are a nation of shopkeepers.

FRED

A nation of shopkeepers! That's what Louis XIV. called the Dutch long before Napoleon applied the term to the English, and yet they gave us a terrible time—the Dutch.

GEORGE

Blow Louis XIV. and Napoleon! I wish you would not waste the few minutes I've got, with brag like that.

GENERAL

I suppose Hitchcock has had to work out in detail the plan of defence.

GEORGE

He made himself devilish important before I got there, and bored them all with his plans and maps and his ideas of strategy. That sort of thing may be all very well with enormous masses of troops—but it is absurd with our little lot of men. He may find out sooner than he cares to know which is the better man to rely upon—one of those school-book strategists, or one who goes hard at the enemy and gives him beans.

FRED

H'm. You've got to get at your enemy if you want to give him "beans."

GEORGE

Rush 'em. Charge 'em with bayonet or lance. Europeans like the Dutch are not likely to be such sneaking cowards as those Boers. I found 'em pretty

decent sort of fellows, and sportsmen in the bargain when I was in The Hague, and they all spoke English. They won't stick behind boulders and on kopjes, and run whenever they see a Britisher —they won't. Anyhow, I don't believe in strategy. Hitting hard—that is how all big battles have been won in the past, and you aren't going to change the world all at once with these new scientific methods.

LADY FULLER

I hate all scientific methods. The organised calculated butchery of to-day is simply loathsome—a sort of planned massacre, that men like Hitchcock seem to delight in. A most ungentlemanly occupation.

Enter LUCY with FRANCES in a long flowing morning gown. The latter goes straight to GEORGE and kisses him very affectionately.

FRED

Every generation fights with the deadliest weapons at its disposal.

LADY FULLER

I should like to see the world return by consent to lance and sword.

FRANCES

And I wish they would give up all fighting and adopt in earnest The Hague convention—abolish all armies and live in brotherly contentment.

GEORGE

That's a speech for a soldier's wife. Brotherly contentment—The Hague convention.

[*They go to the back and are seen in affectionate talk.*]

LADY FULLER

The Hague convention is out of the question, of course.

FRED

You mean that *gentlemen* would lose their occupation.

LADY FULLER

I for one would very strictly limit the Army proper to people of birth. Then in case of war I would turn on the *businesslike* slaughterers—à la Hitchcock. I'd pay them, of course—in a *businesslike* way—as the police are paid or the fire brigade. (*Poking the fire.*) To poke this fire I don't use that delicate bright brass instrument—I poke it with a mean black “businesslike” little pokeret. It does the work ever so much better than the other one, and does not get soiled by contact with the dirty coal. It is monstrous that the Army should become the stepping-stone to social rank for quite obscure young men. Men like Hitchcock are unfit to be in command over men of birth, but they have a very proper purpose, to do the dirty work and be businesslike—as this pokeret is businesslike and does its dirty work.

LUCY

Major Hitchcock is as brave as a lion, and nobler in his life and thoughts than if his escutcheon had a hundred quarterings.

LADY FULLER

I hope so—but I doubt it. I can only assure you, my dear, that if this absurd marriage depended upon an act of bravery on Major Hitchcock's part, I for one should not be very uneasy. Believe me I have seen a great many instances of shrinking from danger among the lower orders. It is in scientific and calculated butchery at a distance that men like that are generally proficient. I read the other day an account of the invention of a sort of bomb, that on bursting spread so horrible an odour that it killed a whole population. That is what they call warfare nowadays.

LUCY

Mother, how can you say these things? Major Hitchcock will distinguish himself, of that you may be sure.

GENERAL

Believe in your hero, my child, and remember that if he does distinguish himself, I am pledged——

LADY FULLER

I resent any interference—even yours—in this matter. It is positively horrible to have to countenance such sentiments—to make the matter of marrying one's daughter depend upon her suitor's skill in scientific slaughter.

*Enter ORDERLY from verandah with folded note,
which he hands to GEORGE.*

GEORGE

[*Reads while FRANCES looks over his shoulder.*] “Major Hitchcock to Captain Vansittart: Signalling from camp that we are both urgently wanted. Going on as fast as I can; please follow immediately. General wires from Chatham ordering strictest vigilance; men under arms. War declared by Holland.”

FRANCES

Awful—awful.

GEORGE

God! This looks like business. Don't be frightened, little woman, don't be frightened. I'll come back unhurt, you may be sure of that.

FRANCES

[*Clinging to him, and in tears.*] Oh, George! George!

GEORGE

Be brave, Frances, be brave. Good-bye, dearest, good-bye! [*Kissing her tenderly.*] Good-bye, mother!

LADY FULLER

Good-bye, my boy; take care of yourself. Take care.

GEORGE

Good-bye, uncle.

GENERAL

Good-bye, my boy. If there is any fighting, remember that you are a Vansittart.

GEORGE

I shan't forget. Good-bye, Lucy; cheer Frances for me and look after her, but don't build up your hopes too high on the strategy of your city soldier. Strategy and books are rot. [*Slamming his scabbard on the ground.*] It is this which will bring the Dutchman to his senses.

[*Exit with ORDERLY.* Bugles are heard in the distance.

CURTAIN.

ACT THE SECOND

Cannon shot are heard in the distance, and continue at intervals during the early part of this Act. It grows dark towards the end.

FRANCES

[*Wrapped in a woollen shawl, alone in the conservatory, is looking out into the twilight, as if straining her eyes to see something. After a while she rushes to the verandah and opens the door for LUCY, who enters worn and excited, with dishevelled hair under a Tam o' shanter.*] Oh, Lucy, where have you been? I have stood here and strained my eyes for you all day.

LUCY

All day?—why did you not rest?

FRANCES

Who could rest with that noise?

LUCY

They have not been shooting all day.

FRANCES

The intervals were not long ; and what with the suspense and one's thoughts—how should I rest ? I wanted to come out, too—to go with you.

LUCY

It is better here than in the village. The people have lost their heads—the few that seem to be left.

FRANCES

Where have the villagers gone to ?

LUCY

God knows. Every hulking lout from the plough seems to have turned into a recruit since last night, and the women are either howling or helping.

FRANCES

Helping—those women *can* help.

LUCY

So could we, if only we dared—at least *I* could.

FRANCES

Where have you been all day, Lucy, where ? You look starved ! Have you had no food ?

LUCY

I had some milk in the morning. That was all I wanted.

FRANCES

Why did you leave me all day long ?

LUCY

I did not want to leave you. I did not think, I could not think. I was yonder at the cross roads most of the day watching for a messenger. I had placed the gardener's boys at the side gates in case any one should ride in from there. Just now they came and fetched even them away—to dig, they said.

FRANCES

To dig ? I know—graves.

LUCY

No, not graves—trenches, they said ; and they carried away every hand that could hold a spade or a pick.

FRANCES

And no message came during all the long hours while you waited ?

LUCY

No message—only that hellish noise. He promised that, happen what might, I should have news early, before sunset. It is nearly six now, and yet there is no sign. If he were hurt—O God!—if he were hurt; or, Frances, if——[*She buries her head on her sister's shoulder.*] Do you hear that?

FRANCES

It sounds as if the world were coming to an end.

LUCY

He is so reckless, so daring, so magnificent.

FRANCES

Dear George!

LUCY

[*Pulling away from her.*] I was not thinking of George.

FRANCES

Oh, Lucy! Lucy!

LUCY

Forgive me, Sis; I cannot help it. I love him so much—so much.

FRANCES

You must not. Think of us others. Think of mother, your family traditions, the Vansittarts. Think of George and his position in the Guards. His career would be ruined; remember George — your brother George—my George.

LUCY

Do you think that George cares so much for his career? And even if he did, do you really imagine that any one of his friends would care a rap about whom I might marry?

FRANCES

You know how proud he is—he, the smartest officer in the whole Army.

LUCY

I know that, and, little as I value that sort of ambition, I would not willingly cause him even an inconvenience. But I cannot give up my life's happiness for a simple fad.

FRANCES

A fad, indeed! Surely, Lucy, you must have some pride of race. You call the Vansittart tradition a fad?

LUCY

If family tradition involves the sacrifice of the individual, then indeed I do call it a fad.

FRANCES

I call that sentiment selfish—egotistical !

LUCY

Don't call me selfish, Frances. I hope I am not selfish. I'd gladly do anything in my power for you—anything but that.

FRANCES

Anything—but that ! Anything but what you are asked to do. Anything—but the one thing that lies in your power to do.

LUCY

Anything but break my word to him—but break my heart and wreck my life.

FRANCES

Your word—your heart—your life ! Of course ; and what are we to you ? Your brother, your mother and I !

LUCY

I did not think that you would take this matter as they do. I had relied on you—you, who have the man you love. Do you remember how you used to confide to me your love for George, although I was only a child—make me speak of you to him—fetch and carry for both of you—yes, and tell lie after lie for your sake; do you forget that I was willing to help you both to elope, when George was ploughed and it was doubtful if he'd ever get his commission? You must remember that your father would not hear of your marriage unless George got into the Army.

FRANCES

You will say next that it was you who got him his commission. His commission was never in doubt, with your uncle's influence.

LUCY

Uncle would not have used his influence to further the ends of his family—never, and it is wicked of you to insinuate that——

FRANCES

I insinuated nothing of the sort—of course, George got in easily enough in the end. It is you who jump at conclusions.

Enter LADY FULLER, followed by an ORDERLY.

LADY FULLER

Here is a messenger with a letter for you, Lucy. He declines to give it into other hands than yours.

ORDERLY

Miss Lucy Vansittart?

LUCY

That is I, Orderly.

ORDERLY

I have instructions from Major Hitchcock to deliver this letter to you personally, to ask for your reply and to bring it to him at once.

LUCY

Thank you, Orderly; will you please wait in the conservatory? [*Exit ORDERLY to conservatory.*]

LADY FULLER

This is a piece of impertinence.

LUCY

[*Opens the envelope, and slips a small folded billet-doux out of it into her bosom. She unfolds the letter*

itself ostentatiously and reads.] “ Found eight Dutch men-of-war opposite Hastings effecting landing ; tried to bombard ships, but was out-ranged. Got most inhabitants away ; place held by enemy, shelling them, hope to drive them back to ships in a few hours. George, attempting to outflank enemy. Trust he will succeed. Be prepared to leave. Train ready for you in Junction station. Await next dispatch.—HITCHCOCK.” *Drops the dispatch.]*

FRANCES

[Picks up the dispatch.] George is in danger ; I know it—I know it ! Hitchcock is in his trenches as safe as in bed, and there’s George recklessly doing all the fighting by himself. It is as clear as daylight “ attempting to outflank enemy. Trust he will succeed.” But if he does not succeed—why is he so mad and brave, and why does Hitchcock let him—Hitchcock—the——

LUCY

‘ Tell the man to wait—I will write my answer.

[Exit.]

LADY FULLER

Don’t excite yourself, Frances. *[Reads the dispatch over to herself.]* I don’t see what answer to this can be called for.

FRANCES

Tell the man to ride fast—give him money to ride

fast ; promise Hitchcock anything—everything—if only he saves George.

LADY FULLER

Calm yourself. I will talk to the man. [*Going to window.*] Orderly, there is no answer to this letter——

FRANCES

But, mother——

LADY FULLER

There is no answer to this letter. Tell Major Hitchcock that Lady Fuller relies upon him to do his duty.

FRANCES

Tell him to save Captain Vansittart at any price—at any price. He must be saved.

ORDERLY

I beg your pardon, madam ; Captain Vansittart was perfectly well when I saw him last.

FRANCES

You saw him ! When did you see him ?

ORDERLY

It must have been at about three o'clock.

FRANCES

And when did you leave Major Hitchcock?

ORDERLY

At ten minutes past five.

FRANCES

And you did not see Captain Vansittart between then?

ORDERLY

No, ma'am. But there was no fighting going on when I left, and there had not been a shot since two o'clock, although they've been going it again while I was on my way here. Major Hitchcock seemed to be waiting for reinforcements from Eastbourne and Lewes—also instructions from headquarters. You see, things must be awkward for the Major in the absence of the Colonel, and having to act on his own responsibility——

LADY FULLER

That will do, my man. You can go now; ride as fast as you can. There is no further answer.

ORDERLY

Begging your pardon, ma'am, could I not see the young lady?

LADY FULLER

You are to be off, do you hear

ORDERLY

Major Hitchcock gave me strict instructions to take an answer back from Miss Vansittart.

LADY FULLER

Tell Major Hitchcock that Miss Vansittart's answer is, that there is *no answer to his letter*.

ORDERLY

Very well, ma'am. [Exit ORDERLY, in doubt.]

FRANCES

Mother, was that wise?

LADY FULLER

You will have the goodness to let me judge of that.

[*Sitting down, she folds the dispatch carefully and systematically, smooths it out and puts it on the writing-table.*]

Enter LUCY.

LUCY

Here is the answer—— [*She rushes towards the conservatory and sees the man has left. She opens the verandah door and calls wildly.*] Orderly! Orderly! [*She comes in, her face flushed with anger.*] Who sent that man away?

LADY FULLER

I gave Major Hitchcock's messenger your reply, and told him to take it as quickly as he could.

LUCY

How could you? What message did you send?

LADY FULLER

I said there was no answer to that letter. I added my—Lady Fuller's—hope that Major Hitchcock would do his duty.

LUCY

You sent that as *my* message?

LADY FULLER

As your message, Lucy. And I would have you remember whom you are speaking to.

LUCY

You had no right to do that.

LADY FULLER

Would you teach me what is my right? Do you forget yourself so far? My right? My right? It is within my right to forbid that young man to address letters to you or to see you. Let there be no mistake about that, please. I will have my way in my house and with respect to my children. I have always had my way, and I shall continue to have it. My will and my will alone is paramount, and I will not allow even your uncle's meddlesome interference in a matter which I, as your mother, am better capable of judging than you are, or than any one else is. For the present I forbid you to correspond with Major Hitchcock, and I shall, I fancy, have no difficulty in stopping his further advances. [*To FRANCES.*] I will go upstairs now to give the maids orders to pack and prepare, in case we are forced to leave—which God forbid! [*Exit.*]

[*Embarrassed silence between the sisters.*]

LUCY

[*After a few moments she pounces upon the dispatch and hides it in her dress.*] I suppose I have you to thank for this.

FRANCES

Oh, Lucy, don't blame me. I told the man to say to Hitchcock that if he saved George he could have whatever he asked for. I told him to save George at any price.

LUCY

George at any price!—at the price of his life, maybe—but George; your George—only George! Why did you not tell the man to wait?

Enter FRED.

FRANCES

I could not! I tried—indeed I did. I would have stopped him. Is there no one to go after him, no one in the place?

FRED

There is not a man in the place, except myself.

LUCY

Has mother told you? There is his letter.

FRED

I met mother in the Hall—she told me there was a dispatch from Hitchcock; let me see for myself.
[*Reads.*]

LUCY

Oh for a man, to tell him that we are watching and waiting and praying. To beg him to take shelter where he can, to conjure him to come back unhurt. The cannon—listen to it—hear it; isn't it awful? And to think it is mowing down men like grass. And the poor wounded, too, lying out on the downs with their limbs broken and their wounds untended. If only I were out there; if only I knew where to find him!

FRED

It is best for women to be at home.

LUCY

But he must be told. Mother sent his man away with a lying message.

FRED

If he were killed and believed that message.

LUCY

That would be terrible. No, it must not be. I will go myself.

FRANCES

You cannot go; how can you? And you would

only be a hindrance. You could not even tend the wounded.

LUCY

Indeed I could; but it is not the wounded that I am thinking of only—not the wounded, nor the dying, nor the dead. I'd like to share with them the work also—side by side. Prove that I'm not afraid!

FRED

If you are not afraid, perhaps you could go, after all.

FRANCES

You are mad, both of you!

LUCY

I'd like to fight just as those Boer women fight!

FRED

That, Lucy, is just what I feel always, always—so much more than you can feel it. And yet I can't—shall never be able to do that. You don't know what—as a man—it is to be like this. God, why did'st Thou give me life, if life was to be such a curse?

[FRANCES, *full of emotion, retires into the conservatory. Enter LADY FULLER and GENERAL, in conversation, which is arrested by this outburst.*

[Gets up with the aid of his stick, and grows wilder in his expression as he notices LADY FULLER.] I curse the day wherein I was born, and the world too into which I was born. Had it not been for the care and the nursing and the pampering of the pampered, I should have died as the weakly children of the people die. But I was dragged up against God's will—dragged up a curse to myself and a nuisance to those around me. Ah that God would grant me the thing that I long for—or loose his hand and cut me off.

LADY FULLER

My boy, how can you forget yourself so far? You, who have always been contented and happy, now rail at your fate? You, who have had every care and all the love that a mother could give, speak of yourself as a nuisance! You have never been allowed to imagine that I thought you a nuisance.

FRED

You have never done that. I do not blame you, mother. I blame the unfortunate circumstances that prevented my dying as I should have died, as every cripple should die! Died as Nature ordained that the weakly should die. Why did you not kill me? Why should I be mocked daily with the irony of my blue blood? I'd give every drop of it, and all the ancestors that are the comfort of your life, to be—a Hitchcock.

GENERAL

This is not the time or the place for such talk, my boy—not the time for vain reproaches. Calm yourself. Remember that while those out there are called upon to do their work without complaint—to give their lives unflinchingly, however dear they may seem to them—we men who remain at home are called upon to share the burden of those [*pointing to the three women*]*—to brighten with calm and cheerfulness their thoughts, to lessen the anguish of the weaker vessel. That is our task!*

FRED

[*Almost beside himself.*] Calm and cheerfulness for *me*—the old story—and *their* burden! It is always some one else's burden, never mine. When a moment of anguish comes in their lives they are overwhelmed with it. And I, whose anguish is lifelong, must suffer with calm and cheerfulness? Hell knows no suffering next to mine!

GENERAL

Be reasonable. I, too, have my troubles, and indeed they are not light; we all have. I, too, would be out there among them if I could. But I am made to understand that I am no longer wanted—that I am too old. It is worse—far worse for me than for you: I am compelled to realise that I have *become* useless, that the end is near and yet so

little done; that although at one time I was counted upon and could not be missed, I am now passed over—ignored—perhaps forgotten. You can't miss what you haven't known.

FRED

That is just it: never to have known what it is to be a man. To have to lie here all one's life—quietly, idly, uselessly—chided if you complain; never, I say, never to have been a man among men—never to have borne arms and destroyed your foe as man lusts to do. That is the horror of war, mother, that is the *real* horror of war! Do you understand that, all of you? Can you understand? You women cannot even dream of the intoxication—of the mad plunge—of the excitement.

GENERAL

Nor can *you* dream of or conceive the horror of war—the pain, the suffering—the unspeakable misery of it.

FRED

And yet you yourself would go out if you could. You admit that you are thirsting to be among them. How often have you not spoken to me of it; made me dream of it, the glorious heavenly risking and doing; made me hope and pray that some miracle would

take this curse from me—hope against hope—hope turned into despair. It's useless, useless to hope! I cannot bear it any longer! I *must* go to them with you, Lucy; we two, Lucy—you and I—we must go; and if it is only for once, for once.

[He throws his sticks down and attempts to walk by himself, but collapses. LUCY catches him in her arms and leads him back to his seat.]

FRANCES *rushes in from conservatory.*

LUCY

Oh, Fred!

FRANCES

He is mad!

LADY FULLER

For God's sake, my boy, spare us this nightmare! You will kill me!

GENERAL

Be sensible——

FRED

I know—I'll be sensible. But, Lucy, you go; you can go, and you must go! If you can't nurse, give

them drink—yes, water for the wounded who lie parched on the ground. Help, help ; do anything—anything ; carry them food for their hunger and their guns.

LUCY

Calm yourself ; I will go.

FRED

Yes, I will be calm. I'll lie here—lie here till I rot. But you must go out to them ; leave the cripples and the aged and the useless women at home. Go, sister, go ! If you see Hitchcock, tell him that his friend is lying here and cursing his luck that he hasn't a bullet in him and isn't out there instead—bleeding on the open downs.

LUCY

I will go, Fred. I will tell him that.

LADY FULLER

You cannot go. It is impossible.

GENERAL

Wait till to-morrow, child ; it is growing dark now.

LUCY

But they want me there now—the wounded on the downs; to-morrow they may be dead.

LADY FULLER

My child, I appeal to you; you won't find your way, even. It is night already.

FRANCES

Let her go, mother, let her go. George may want her. She knows every inch of the way—knows it in the dark.

LADY FULLER

She might not find George—and if she were hurt.

LUCY

I shall not be hurt. The firing has almost ceased: I shall find my way easily enough on my bicycle and I will light my lamp. There will be folk enough on the road.

FRED

Go at once, at once. The Dutch will be in the Channel by the time you get there; go and see them drowned like rats.

LADY FULLER

Child, is it really the wounded you are craving to tend? Is it not——

LUCY

I am going to give Major Hitchcock, *if I see him*, my answer to his message—the answer which you prevented me from sending—*if I see him*, and I hope I shall see him; but I will stop for every wounded by the way. Whether I see Major Hitchcock or not, I shall help anywhere and everywhere—where I can help. I want you, Fred, to give this letter to Major Hitchcock if you see him before I do.

LADY FULLER

If only you would give one time to consider—if only you would not be so precipitate. I did not think that your mind could be so sternly set ——

LUCY

Is it not my duty to keep my word? Major Hitchcock has my word.

FRED

[*To Lucy, aside.*] She'll never give in. You said

yourself she had sent his man away—purposely to cut you off from him—purposely——

LUCY

I know—I know.

FRED

He may be wounded——

LUCY

Don't say that. Yes, I must go—I will go—go at once. Mother, I must go [*kissing* LADY FULLER]; forgive the anxiety I am causing you. I shall not be hurt—I will take care.

GENERAL

[*As he kisses LUCY.*] Good-bye, my child; Fact is, I cannot find fault with you. Good-bye; God bless you. [*Exit* LUCY.]

[*Silence.*]

LADY FULLER

My whole family in rebellion! We shall see who is mistress in the end.

GENERAL

Are you not touched by the beautiful devotion of your child?

LADY FULLER

Beautiful devotion ! She should show her devotion to me—instead of treating my orders, my wishes, with contempt.

GENERAL

My dear sister, you should forbear with the young.

LADY FULLER

Shall a mother's wish—a parent's command count for naught ?

FRED

Why did you deny her what was her right ?

LADY FULLER

Her right ? What could she have written to him ? My answer was the only suitable answer. Give me that letter.

FRED

Lucy's letter to Hitchcock ? Never.

LADY FULLER

I want that letter, Fred.

FRANCES

The letter is addressed to Major Hitchcock

LADY FULLER

I demand that letter, Fred. I have a right to that letter. A young girl's correspondence is at her mother's discretion.

FRED

Not when that mother acts without discretion. Then she forfeits her right.

GENERAL

[To LADY FULLER.] I would not insist ; it is best to leave some things to chance. Fred is obstinate—but he is entitled to be determined.

FRANCES

The letter was given to him in trust—Lucy confided in his honour.

GENERAL

Don't force him to choose between disobeying you and being disloyal to his sister.

LADY FULLER

And my authority? Am I no one? Are my wishes, my orders to be disregarded in everything?

GENERAL

Your wishes will, I hope, I doubt not, always remain paramount in your family. But I feel that

you are wrong to insist further in this. Indeed you are ! Let me persuade you to drop it. Everything will come right in the end.

LADY FULLER

God give it does come right—I have my fears. Could one not find some one at least who could follow Lucy? Follow her and bring her back—or dog her steps—look after her and prevent her from being too rash—too imprudent.

GENERAL

I will see if I can find some one to go after her, but there is, I fear, little chance. The village is everywhere deserted. [Exit.

LADY FULLER

[To FRED.] I shall never forgive you for this!

FRED.

I am sorry, mother ; I cannot help myself.

FRANCES

She won't be hurt.

LADY FULLER

But why should a delicate young girl—a Vansittart—expose herself to the horrible evidence of war?

FRED

She is brave—she will not shrink.

Enter ORDERLY with dispatch which he hands to

LADY FULLER, who passes it on to FRED.

ORDERLY

Lady Fuller ?

FRED

“DEAR MATER: Nasty brush with the enemy—slight scratch on arm—nothing to speak of. Shall be with you soon. Break this gently to Frances. GEORGE.”

FRANCES

He is dying, I know he is. Where is he, Orderly ?

ORDERLY

He is at headquarters, ma'am. He is pretty comfortably looked after. You needn't fret, ma'am ; he isn't much hurt—as things have been going over there. A good many nasty casualties, ma'am, on account of those bursting bullets. The Dutch are sneaks, you know, ma'am—never know how to take 'em. Thank God, we've killed a good many of them, though, and we've driven them back, 'pretty well down to the beach.

FRANCES

And where was Captain Vansittart hurt?

ORDERLY

Close by the Old Fort. It was like this, ma'am. Major Hitchcock had his men on the ridge behind the town, and they'd thrown up earthworks. He must have had some six or eight field-pieces with him, and these did most of the execution among the Dutch as they came up from the town. We could work on them freely, because the naval guns never got our range and we heard their bombs whizzing overhead.

FRANCES

Never mind about the Dutch; tell me where Captain Vansittart was wounded.

ORDERLY

I was just going to explain. The Dutch got most of their men landed in the night—some six thousand strong they must have been—and they'd rushed the Old Fort before we knew where we were. When Captain Vansittart sees 'em come up towards Major Hitchcock's position, he tries a flanking movement with the horse, knowing that the Dutch could not have got any guns of their own into the Fort, and thinking, I suppose,

that ours must have been spiked before our men were rushed; unless he was thinking that there were breech-loaders in the fort and that the breech-loads had been carried away. Lor'! but there are no breech-loaders anywhere along the coast in these parts. Well, somehow he gets his men well within range of two of them fort guns, and Lor'! it was awful to see 'em mowed down. That's where Captain Vansittart got hit—but not bad; 'pon my honour, it ain't no more than a scratch.

LADY FULLER

Were very many of the men killed?

ORDERLY

A good number, ma'am. You see, the fire came on so sudden-like. They'd just been lying low to let Captain Vansittart come close up. As soon as Major Hitchcock sees what was going on in the Fort, he opens fire back, and it wasn't more than ten minutes afore he had silenced the fort guns. Wonderful, it was.

LADY FULLER

And while all this was going on Major Hitchcock was of course in perfect personal security?

ORDERLY

Well, I don't know so much about his security. As soon as he'd got those guns set, off he goes himself

and gives orders to the straggling horse—wonderful he was. And then he goes over and has Captain Vansittart put on a stretcher and brought quite comfortably into camp.

LADY FULLER

What luck that man has—the *canaille* always does. He'll make out that he saved George's life.

ORDERLY

Well, ma'am—as far as saving any particular life is concerned, there would not have been a man saved out of 'em all except for Major Hitchcock's action—not a man. He was wonderful, ma'am, wonderful!

FRANCES

Bless Major Hitchcock!

ORDERLY

Wonderful he was, ma'am, wonderful!

LADY FULLER

We have heard that already. I only hope you would not express as vigorously your dissatisfaction with your officer should things accidentally go wrong.

ORDERLY

See, ma'am, we're taught not to criticise. We Tommies are told only to obey and look up to our officers.

LADY FULLER

I notice this dispatch is not in Captain Vansittart's handwriting.

ORDERLY

It will be a while, I should think, before you'll see his handwriting, ma'am.

FRANCES

Then where is his wound?

ORDERLY

In the hand, ma'am—may lose a finger or two; nothing serious, I assure you.

FRANCES

Nothing serious—a finger or two. And when will they bring him here?

ORDERLY

Captain Vansittart would not come. Major Hitchcock was for sending him over at once with me. But

Captain Vansittart wanted to mount again as soon as he'd been dressed. But he'd lost a lot of blood, and the surgeon shook his head.

LADY FULLER

Brave boy!

FRANCES

Reckless as usual! How could he ride again—why, how could he hold his reins with his hand shot?

ORDERLY

You see, ma'am, it was his right hand.

FRANCES

Oh, of course; but still, it would have been mad.

ORDERLY

Major Hitchcock prevented him.

FRANCES

I am so grateful to Major Hitchcock—tell him so from me, if you see him.

FRED

[*Aside to LADY FULLER.*] Hitchcock probably thought the men safer with George out of the way.

LADY FULLER

Really, Fred, you are intolerable. Don't you feel for your wounded brother?

FRED

Indeed, I do; and I only hope he is no more hurt than the man says—that would be a small price to pay to have him out of the way.

ORDERLY

I'll beg you to excuse me, ma'am, if there is no answer for Captain Vansittart.

FRANCES

Tell him from me—his wife—that if he loves me he is to return here at once—at once. Tell him that I am ill, that I want him at once, do you hear—at once?

ORDERLY

Yes, ma'am, at once.

LADY FULLER

Tell him to be wise, and to follow Major Hitchcock's advice.

FRED

Yes—to follow Major Hitchcock's advice. He'll be all right if he does that. [*Exit* ORDERLY.]

LADY FULLER

Major Hitchcock seems to have managed this matter very ably, and to have behaved quite well.

FRANCES

I could hug him : to think of his taking all that special care of George, when he had the whole action to lead !

FRED

To think, too, of his risking his life for George—more by a long chalk than George would have done for him !

LADY FULLER

We must be generous, and admit some indebtedness to Major Hitchcock, although one recognises in this again that men like him, of his calculating disposition, would never run unnecessary risks—the sort of chivalrous risk that a man like George could not help taking.

FRED

Fools run unnecessary risks, without being heroes

—and heroes run unnecessary risks, without being fools.

LADY FULLER

If those are your sentiments towards your brother, you might at least, at a moment like this, consider Frances. Frances, poor child, let me take you to your room. You should lie down and rest—you must not tire yourself too much.

FRANCES

I'll be better here, waiting for him—better than worrying upstairs, alone.

LADY FULLER

Only remember, dearest, it is your duty to be strong.

FRANCES

I'll lie here, mother, and rest. I shall be quite as comfortable here. [*She lies on sofa, LADY FULLER covering her up. She dozes off.*]

[*It grows dark. Silence.*]

Enter GENERAL.

GENERAL

I got the telegraph boy to let me deliver a wire he

had for the Vicar, and made him follow Lucy. He was the only human being I came across, and it was fortunate that he was on his bicycle.

LADY FULLER

I trust he may find her and not lose sight of her.

GENERAL

I gave him strict and very clear instructions.

FRED

Have you seen this dispatch from George, uncle?

GENERAL

From George? [*He tries to read, but cannot see.*] What is there in it, Fred? Read; I'll ring for the lamp. [*He rings, but no one answers the bell.*]

FRED

Got himself into a mess—that's all. Wounded slightly and rescued by Hitchcock—as might have been expected.

GENERAL

The fortune of war is fickle. Fact is the bravest and

best are its victims sometimes. Is there no further news about the action itself?

FRED

The orderly seemed to think that the Dutch must be driven back right down to the beach by now.

GENERAL

Then the General has turned up, I suppose?

FRED

Oh no! Hitchcock and Hitchcock only is the hero.

GENERAL

And what is George's wound?

FRED

Only a scratch, it seems.

FRANCES

A scratch! He will lose at least two fingers, the orderly said; and how should he know that it won't be the whole hand? He will have to give up polo!

GENERAL

[*Rings again.*] They don't seem to hear. I'd like to read the dispatch myself.

LADY FULLER

The whole establishment is disorganised ; the men have all gone and the maids are packing and preparing for us to leave—they have lost their heads. That things should have come to this—to be driven from house and home ! It's barbarous—barbarous.

[*Pause.*]

FRED

A fine house of nobles !

GENERAL

You make things harder to bear than they need be with your sneering. For an old soldier to be reminded constantly——

FRED

I beg your pardon, uncle ; I did not want to hurt you. I was only thinking of the value of it all, and that blue blood—and even bloodshed are good for no one.

[*It has grown quite dark. The GENERAL rings repeatedly. No one answers the bell, and at last they all sit silent in the dark, like shadows silhouetted against the night outside. Only the distant noise of an occasional rifle is heard.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT THE THIRD

[*It is still half dark, and the curtains are partially drawn. A sleepy maidservant, who has the appearance of having been up all night, comes in, draws the curtains and opens a window, letting in early sunlight. She dusts superficially, and seeing FRANCES asleep on the sofa and FRED in his chair, awake and alert, moves noiselessly past the former and hands FRED the morning paper, which is creased and untidy.*

FRED

[*Unfolding the paper, which crackles and awakens FRANCES.*] I thought you would never wake up. I have sat and watched—watched *you* in here and the *night* out there.

FRANCES

What did you see out there?

FRED

Only the dark night and a few flashes.

FRANCES

Flashes?

FRED

As if there were a fire raging yonder. The sky was red.

FRANCES

I don't feel as if I had slept. I am cold. Close that window, Emily.

MAID

Yes, ma'am.

FRANCES

What is the time?

FRED

It must be nearly eight o'clock: you've slept ten hours without moving.

FRANCES

Without moving? It seemed so lifelike—so real. Is there no news from George?

FRED

Not since last night. The shooting ceased at midnight. It must all be over by now.

FRANCES

Where is your mother? Is she still asleep? And the General?

FRED

They retired when the firing stopped, to rest without going to bed. That was late. I've sat here all night. They wanted to wake you and take you upstairs. But you slept so soundly that I protested.

FRANCES

I am glad you did. I could not have slept up there, thinking of George with his wound: he might have come in the night and have wanted me. Is there no news from Lucy? Has she returned?

FRED

Lucy is still out there, the little brick. She won't come back just yet——

FRANCES

Nothing can now prevent her marrying Hitchcock——

FRED

Hitchcock—he's too good for any woman.

FRANCES

Not every woman would want him. Still I'm glad for Lucy's sake that he has come out so well. I feel beaten and battered ; sleeping out of bed knocks me up.

FRED

You are pale—you're like our precious George. I bet he prefers an eider-down to a blanket on a ploughed field.

FRANCES

So would any one. I won't listen to your jibes at George. If he comes, send for me. I'll go and make my toilet.

FRED

That's right ; make yourself beautiful for him. He'll soon be back—the battered hero. I'll send for you when he comes. *[Exit FRANCES.]*

[FRED reads the paper while the MAID lights the fire.]

[Pause.]

Enter at conservatory door GEORGE—his arm in a sling.

GEORGE

[Speaking towards the verandah.] That will do, my men ; before you return have a bit of breakfast in the kitchen, then get back to camp as quickly as possible ;

you'll find the kitchen on the left. [*Entering the room.*] Thank God!

FRED

Good morning, George; how are you? I hope the wound is not very painful.

GEORGE

My arm is all right, but I fear I'll have an awful looking hand—for a while, anyhow—beastly awkward. I'm regularly knocked out. [*To the MAID.*] Here, Emily, get me a brandy and soda, quick.

MAID

Yes, sir.

[*Exit.*]

FRED

Have you seen Hitchcock?

GEORGE

He came round at six with the doctor.

FRED

And they thought you strong enough to stand the fatigue of transporting you here?

GEORGE

I suppose they did, or I should not be here

Enter the MAID with glass. GEORGE, drinking deep, sinks down on sofa, on which he finds FRANCES'S shawl and handkerchief.

GEORGE

Hullo ! Whose rags are these ?

FRED

I suppose those must belong to Frances. She went to sleep on the sofa last night, and slept till just before you came in.

GEORGE

In her state—I think you people might have looked after her better than that.

FRED

She insisted on lying there ; thought it would rest her more than if she were left to worry alone upstairs. She will tell you herself—she made me promise to send for her as soon as you came. [*To MAID.*] Tell Mrs. Vansittart that the Captain is here and that he is quite well.

GEORGE

Not quite well—*well* and with his arm in a sling—just to prepare her for the shock. [*Exit MAID.*]

FRED

And Lucy—have you seen Lucy?

GEORGE

How should I have seen Lucy? Is she not here?

FRED

Lucy went over to join Hitchcock when she heard of your being hurt. She wanted to look after you—you and the other——

GEORGE

The other fellow, I know——

FRED

I meant to say the other wounded.

GEORGE

Oh! Odd, that! Is it not? She has taken to that sort of thing pretty suddenly.

FRED

She might have known that her solicitude for you would be thrown away.

GEORGE

I bet she's hanging about Hitchcock. Confound him! The fuss they made of him in camp was unbelievable. Luckily, I managed to be about the first to congratulate him.

FRED

That must have been a great effort for you.

GEORGE

I certainly don't like to fuss about fellows like that—but I could not very well help myself in his case.

FRED

I quite agree with you, considering that he saved your life.

GEORGE

That's simply a matter of luck for him.

FRED

For him? For him?

GEORGE

Of course it is; you can't understand these things, of course—you! However, I'm glad I behaved so generously to him. It made an awfully good impression.

*Enter FRANCES, rushing up to GEORGE and
hugging him.*

FRANCES

George—darling—love——

GEORGE

Dearest!

FRANCES

Are you dreadfully hurt?

GEORGE

Hurt? No, dear—nothing to speak of; a bit knocked out, I fear—nothing more.

FRANCES

It must be awful, a wound like yours. Poor dear darling. Did you faint?

GEORGE

Faint! No, indeed. I wanted to go on—remount; you know, I had my charger shot from under me. Hitchcock simply would not let me, and you see a fellow is dazed when he's shot—gives in without reasoning——

FRANCES

I know. I don't understand how you can sit up now as you do and seem just as usual. How you can smoke and drink brandy and soda—at eight in the morning, too—my dear brave, strong boy!

*Enter LADY FULLER, and immediately after
her the GENERAL.*

LADY FULLER

My dear boy! I am so glad it is not worse, so glad.

GEORGE

I shall be all right again in a very few days. But you, mother? You look tired.

LADY FULLER

Tired through anxiety more than through fatigue—my eyes swimming and my ears deafened—so that they seem to hear even now only the banging of the cannons.

GENERAL

Morning, George! I've been calming your mother and telling her that a little scratch like that does not hurt a soldier; fact is, it does him good.

FRANCES

Uncle! How can you be so inhuman?

GEORGE

You are right! I don't mind the scratch. That's nothing. What I complain of is my infernal hard luck—damned, infernal bad luck, from beginning to end.

LADY FULLER

Control your language, George. My nerves are overstrung to-day. You assure us that you are suffering no pain. Think also of Frances when you are tempted to be so abruptly violent in your expressions.

FRANCES

Don't let him consider me, mother. An oath like that is nothing compared to the scenes that Fred has been making—nothing.

FRED

And what is his scratch compared to my suffering?

LADY FULLER

You have never had a day's suffering in your life!

FRED

Never a day's suffering! Do you think I chose to have one leg half as long as the other, and neither of them fit to stand on?

GEORGE

Every fellow thinks himself the only martyr in the world if he's got anything the matter with him. Anyhow, you'll never risk being shot or maimed.

FRED

Gad, I wish you'd come home with one of your legs blown off—then you'd have known. No, not even then—because you'd have lived before. You cannot conceive how I envy you your wound, and how I'd wish it were ten times worse if I had it, if only I could thereby free myself of these. [*Holding up his sticks.*]

GENERAL

Frances, come with me. I will not witness these unseemly scenes. Fact is, I can't stand it—in face, too, of all that misery. This war at home is worse than that out there.

[*Exit on verandah with FRANCES, who after a while induces him to return.*]

LADY FULLER

You quarrel over nothing, exaggerate your own insignificant differences, but neither of you gives a thought to the fact that your sister is still out there.

GEORGE

How could you let her go?

FRED

She went because she is a brave true English girl.

GEORGE

You would not talk tall words if you had seen what I have seen.

LADY FULLER

I could not keep her; almost before we had realised it, she was gone. The General sent a messenger after her, but he came back without having found her.

GEORGE

He should have looked for Hitchcock.

LADY FULLER

How could I know that she'd take things as she did? I feel nervous, apprehensive! All night horrible visions have haunted me. I dreamed I was walking over the battlefield, when suddenly a form in white stopped me and tried to drive me back. But I

grappled it and struggled with it. At last it fell and a stream of blood broke from its mouth. Its eyes turned cold and glassy; and when I looked close at it, I saw it had Lucy's face. When I looked away from it, Hitchcock's form seemed to spring up.

GEORGE

Sounds uncommonly like nightmare.

LADY FULLER

I have a presentiment, a horrible presentiment, as if my whole family would be maimed, every single member of it!

Enter GENERAL with FRANCES from verandah, where they have been looking through field glasses at the horizon.

GENERAL

I think I have detected Hitchcock in the distance.

LADY FULLER

Is that child with him?

GENERAL

I think not—I saw men only.

GEORGE

I'll bet she is. Don't you worry, mother. She'll have worked herself somehow round to him under

the pretext of thanking him for saving my precious life. To give the devil his due, I must say Hitchcock behaved uncommonly well.

FRED

Hitchcock has more honour in his little finger than all those asses at the "Rag" together—fellows like Montmorency and Clarence.

GENERAL

Fact is, Hitchcock has come out brilliantly, and he is sure of some great distinction. We owe him a debt of gratitude that it will be difficult for us to pay otherwise than by the suppression of any feeling towards him of social superiority.

LADY FULLER

I shall make a point of expressing my most unqualified gratitude to Major Hitchcock, not only for the services he has rendered to his country, but also for those he has rendered to me as the saver of my son's life. I should, nevertheless, find it difficult to bring myself to consider any Hitchcock in the world the equal of a Vansittart.

FRED

[*Ironically.*] So should I!

GEORGE

You may just as well make up your mind to put up with Hitchcock.

FRED

Indeed you will. Just listen to this. I had not looked at the paper before. [*Reads.*] "As we go to press our Special Correspondent telephones from Hastings the complete defeat of the Dutch. Major Hitchcock, who had waited till mid-day for reinforcements and the arrival of his superior officer, was forced into an attacking movement, through a curious mishap which befell Captain Vansittart's horse and which will want further explanation."

GEORGE

Explanation! They'll expect one to see through stone walls next!

FRED

[*Continuing.*] "In the hope of turning the enemy's flank, the gallant young Guardsman——"

FRANCES

Gallant young Guardsman!

FRED

[*Continuing.*] "got his squadron within range of the fort guns, in possession, since the morning, of the

Dutch. These opened a most disastrous fire on him and forced Major Hitchcock to abandon his position, push back the enemy's main body, and extricate Captain Vansittart's squadron. So successful was he in his movement, that within a few hours the Dutch had been driven back to the shore."

GEORGE

My men got even with them there. They charged with drawn swords—giving no quarter.

FRED

[*Continuing.*] "At this very juncture the fleet came in sight, and engaging the enemy's ships, enabled Major Hitchcock to make short work of those on land. His guns completely commanded them, and after blowing up the fort, which ought to have been done before ever it fell into the enemy's hands, he made nearly five thousand prisoners. The enemy lost terribly, and hundreds were drowned in the sight of their own battleships, which are now retiring into the Channel, followed by the Home Squadron."

GENERAL

God give they overtake them.

FRED

What could prevent them from returning the compliment if they do, of landing in Amsterdam and bringing back those stolen flags.

GEORGE

I would not worry about old Van Tromp's flags. They won't do them much good—even if they keep them.

LADY FULLER

They are not worth risking any lives for, anyhow.

FRED

If I were Hitchcock I would not rest until I had brought them back.

GEORGE

He'll have to consult others about that. He is not Commander-in-Chief of both Army and Navy as yet—not that, even with all his luck.

FRED

Luck you dare to call it again—his success—luck?

GEORGE

Luck, yes, that's just what it is. Here am I, almost the first man under fire, the first to be wounded, with a good chance of being cashiered; and there is he—never much chance of being hurt, except just when he came to rescue us—with a certain V.C. and a jolly good chance of being made a national idol, as well as getting a whopping promotion.

GENERAL

You are surely the last to grudge him that !

GEORGE

I don't object to Hitchcock, never really did—especially after the way he behaved.

FRED

At least he'll be good enough to be admitted into our august family.

LADY FULLER

All this does not change the fact that Lucy's marriage with Major Hitchcock is hardly the sort of alliance we should have hoped for.

GEORGE

No one can deny that. Of course, as I am now under an obligation to him, I recognise equally that I for one must swallow my pride and bless their happy union with as sweet a face as I can command.

LADY FULLER

We must all sink our feelings. [*To GENERAL.*] I wish you nevertheless to know that it remains, and always will remain, a hateful thought to me that a daughter of mine should have been won by a man's talent for organised butchery.

GENERAL

War is ennobling.

LADY FULLER

In savage lands, maybe, and in savage ages, but not in a Christian land reigned over by a Christian Queen.

GEORGE

I'd like to know what would become of all the chaps about town if there were no Army, and what's the Army's use if there is never to be a war?

FRED

We suffer of too little, not too much, soldiering. The trouble is that the Army should be composed of, and in the hands of, chaps about town, as George says. The Army should be the nation, if we wish to maintain our great Empire. What is wanted is to have every man a soldier.

LADY FULLER

Thank God I shall not live to see conscription in England.

FRED

On the contrary, you stand a very good chance of seeing it. Our leaders have adopted the policy of Napoleon, who dreamt of conquering the world. To carry it through the means must be found, and they are owned only by a soldier nation.

*Enter HITCHCOCK from verandah. Military salute.
Congratulations.*

GENERAL

Major Hitchcock, allow an old man to shake you by the hand—an old soldier who is happy and proud to call you his friend. I believe I am saying what my sister will only too readily echo, that our family will consider itself honoured——

LADY FULLER

[*Interrupting.*] Now, really, my dear, don't you think Major Hitchcock would take some refreshment after his long ride? He must quite need it after all his exertions. My dear Major Hitchcock, won't you take some breakfast; or if you have had it, would you like to join George?

HITCHCOCK

Thank you, I want nothing just now; at least, not until— Lady Fuller, where is she?

LADY FULLER

Lucy! Haven't you seen her? We thought she would return with you. Where is the child? Major Hitchcock, where is she?

HITCHCOCK

I was under the impression that she had come back here hours ago. I only saw her for a moment. It must have been at ten o'clock or thereabouts. We were in a nasty spot, exposed to cross-fire—about their last gasp. I ordered her back the moment she came.

LADY FULLER

But how could she get to you ?

HITCHCOCK

How she got through to me is more than I can tell. If those men in the dip near the station had not lost their heads, they would have stopped her. The whole upper town was one mass of blazing houses. It was like daylight almost, and the wind carried the smoke and flames down on to the enemy. That helped us, of course. But there she stood, unconcerned, a black spot in her skirts against the fiery background, leaning on her bicycle. I put her under arrest, in charge of two men whom I could trust—calm chaps who would not lose their heads.

LADY FULLER

She is killed, I know, I know she is ! Major Hitchcock, why did you not save her ? at any price ! at any price ! You saved George—why not her ? Why did you not bring her back yourself ?

HITCHCOCK

Would I had! I was in sole command, and could not stir from where I stood. It was the critical moment. They were three to one of us, and if they had had time to make another stand we could not have held our own. George was hurt. What could I do?

GENERAL

Fact is, you could not leave your post.

HITCHCOCK

I put her between the two best men I had and sent her back, so I thought, to safety. She'll be safe yet. The men are certain to bring her back.

LADY FULLER

She went to nurse the wounded.

HITCHCOCK

I know—so she said. I forbade her—there was no need.

FRED

Ha—but she went also—to see *you*—to let *you* know that that other answer was a lie—the answer

to your dispatch—the answer you received, Hitchcock—that was not her answer——

LADY FULLER

I beg of you, Fred, to spare me this.

FRED

Here is her answer. [*Holding up LUCY'S letter and handing it to HITCHCOCK*].

HITCHCOCK

Is that for me? Lady Fuller——

LADY FULLER

Major Hitchcock—I appeal to you not to open that letter at present.

FRED

Yes, open it. Then you will know why she went out there—why she followed you. She was not afraid——

LADY FULLER

I have already told Major Hitchcock that it was Lucy's intention to nurse and help the wounded.

HITCHCOCK

Your wish is a command to me, Lady Fuller. I will not read this letter until you give me permission to do so. It could certainly not enlighten us as to her present whereabouts. [*He puts the letter in his pocket.*]

FRED

It might—how can you know if you do not read what she wrote for you?

HITCHCOCK

When she insisted in staying there and exposing herself, I put her under a military escort. I forced her to leave. She did not seem to realise the danger around her. My men took her away—marched her away between them.

GENERAL

Have those men not been heard of?

HITCHCOCK

I can't say whether they reported themselves or not. I hardly think it possible, because their instructions were to treat Lucy as a prisoner, to bring her here, and to stay here at your service, Lady Fuller, until I came or sent for them.

GENERAL

You had better send your men to find them. Those with Lucy may have been strangers in this country, and have missed their way in the night.

LADY FULLER

Then they would have put up somewhere.

GENERAL

Even in that case they should be here soon.

HITCHCOCK

I will send my men at once, and I will go myself.

GENERAL

Send your men by all means—but I see no purpose in your going. You may as well wait here—for a while, anyhow. If they had put up for the night, they would be here very soon. In that case you would miss her.

HITCHCOCK

You are right. I will stay. But it's hard to stay here—inactive—terrible to think of her out there, seeing the horrible sights—the suffering; hearing the cries—the agony. One cannot think of it! I will send

my men at once. [*Beckoning to the two ORDERLIES standing in the conservatory.*] You know Miss Lucy Vansittart?

FIRST ORDERLY

The lady in camp last night with her bicycle?

HITCHCOCK

That is she.

SECOND ORDERLY

I'd know her anywhere.

FIRST ORDERLY

So would I.

HITCHCOCK

She came out to nurse the wounded, but decided to return for the night. She was in charge of Privates Samson and Evans.

FIRST ORDERLY

I saw them with her, as they left you, sir.

HITCHCOCK

I expected to find her here. She must have lost her way. You are to go out and look for Miss Vansittart and the men. You are to bring them here

as quickly as you can. They are to come here at once. Take horses; send every man you meet in a different direction. Here's money. Find her, find her at any price. A hundred pounds for him who brings her here.

ORDERLIES

We'll find her, sir.

[*The ORDERLIES salute. They pass to the verandah. As they descend towards the park they suddenly stop, only partially in view, on the steps of the verandah. They uncover their heads. Two other soldiers are seen coming up the verandah steps, bearing a stretcher which is covered with a Union Jack. They place it in the conservatory. No one approaches it—a horrible dread seems to have fallen on all. HITCHCOCK stands as if petrified at first. Recognising the two men who were in charge of LUCY, he pulls himself together and faces them as they stand in military attitude beside the bier.*]

HITCHCOCK

Miss Vansittart was in your charge.

FIRST SOLDIER

Her gown seemed to form a target against the glare. She was picked off from between us.

HITCHCOCK

Neither of you was touched?

SECOND SOLDIER

Grazed, sir, by the bullet that hit her. [*Showing a tattered sleeve and scratched arm.*]

HITCHCOCK

You will report yourselves for court-martial.

[*During this FRED has limped to the bier; he looks under the flag, but shrinks back with a hideous cry. He stumbles forward, speechless for a moment. Then at last, with dilated eyes as if demented——*]

FRED

Not I—not I! You drove her out there! You, mother!

[*In the far distance is heard the dim sound of drum and fife playing "Rule Britannia."*]

CURTAIN.



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